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The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness

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This essay began as an attempt to gather information about belief in witchcraft and magic as sources of illness in Anglo-Saxon England, partly as a response to Grattan and Singer's characterization of its medicine as a "mass of folly and credulity", without any theory of disease.¹ However, I found very little evidence in the medical texts that the Anglo-Saxons ascribed illness to human malevolence, and was therefore forced into a much more general consideration of *where* the Anglo-Saxons believed disease came from, and *how* it arose.

In this necessarily summary paper, I have concentrated on the major medical texts in Old English:² *Bald's Leechbook* in two books, with a third from a different source, all in a manuscript of the mid-tenth century, and the somewhat muddled *Lacnunga* collection in a manuscript of about the year 1000. I have only used the *Apuleius* complex, as it appears in British Library MS. Vitellius C.iii and its cognates, as corroboration. It is not much concerned with causes, and since so much of it is a literal translation from Latin we cannot tell how far its ideas were assimilated into Anglo-Saxon thinking. Its remedies for bites of scorpions³ and poisonous spiders,⁴ for example, are inappropriate for England. *Peri didaxeon* (in late Old English but extant only in a thirteenth-century manuscript), marginal remedies, and even the Omont leaf at Louvain-la-Neuve,⁵ rarely have anything about causes, and are only referred to incidentally.

What first struck me about *Bald's Leechbook*, too, was that for many diseases no cause was stated, or they were assumed to arise from "the human condition". The compiler(s) knew well that cold, wind, smoke, and dust can harm the eyes (I.2), that apples, nuts, and peas can cause windiness (II.39), that things can go wrong with pregnancy and childbirth (II.60),⁶ and that if one walks too far, one's feet and legs swell up (I.27). In their attitude to illness, therefore, the Anglo-Saxons used their observation and reasoning, as we do.

Where, then, do we think our diseases come from? Most of us believe what our doctors tell us – and that depends not only on what they know,

but also on how far they wish to, or believe they can, explain it to us, and how far we understand their explanations. Speaking for myself, I believe in viruses and bacteria and the differences between them only because of what scientists tell me; I would be incapable of evaluating any evidence about them for myself. There is always a difference between current scholarly opinion and popular views of medicine.

In a preliminary anthropological study of "Anglo-Saxon magico-medicine", and the different ways of reacting to the problem of disease, Nigel Barley wrote:

Disease can be seen as caused by the invasion of the body by alien matter or force from without. Treatment then consists in removing it. It can be viewed as the loss, by a man, of something normally inherent to him. In this case, treatment consists in returning it to him. A third possible view would be to see disease as caused by a disruption of the natural order within the body. Here, treatment would entail reestablishing that order.⁷

When the compiler of *Bald's Leechbook* moves away from "natural" causes, the explanation he usually adopts – and which seems to underlie the whole work – is that of imbalance. For example:

I.15: Se hwosta hæfð manigfealdne tocyme swa þa spatl beoð missenlicu: hwilum cymð of ungemetfæstre hæto; hwilum of ungemetfaestum cyle; [hwilum of ungemetlicre wætan]; hwilum of ungemetlicre drignesse.

(Cough has a varied approach, as the saliva are various: sometimes it comes from immoderate heat; sometimes from immoderate cold; [sometimes from immoderate humidity]; sometimes from immoderate dryness.)

This seems fair enough: how often do we talk of people having heatstroke, or catching a chill because they were caught in the rain? So observation could have first suggested these "causes". In the Old English medical texts, however, they were clearly the learned, the physician's explanations, and can be traced back to the Latin originals discovered for them by Cockayne,⁸ Talbot,⁹ and Cameron.¹⁰ They may have been translated specifically for *Bald's Leechbook*; but this same passage concerning cough is found in the *Lacnunga* (§180), in a form that must go back to the same English original but cannot have been taken from the earlier *Leechbook* manuscript, since it has the third "cause", humidity, which *Bald's Leechbook* accidentally omits.¹¹

As causes of hiccup, "hicket" in Cockayne (a kind of indigestion?), the excesses are somewhat different from those occasioning cough:

I.18: Hwonan se micla geoxa cumē opþe hu his mon tilian scule. Se cymð of þam swiðe acoladan magan, opþe of þam to swiðe ahatadan, oððe of to micelre fylle, opþe of to micelre lærnesse oððe of yfelum wætan slitendum 7 sceorfen-dum þone magan.

(Where the great hiccup may come from, and how one should tend it. It comes from a very chilled stomach or from an overheated one, or from surfeit, or from too much emptiness, or from evil humours tearing and scarifying the stomach.) “Evil humours” is Cockayne’s translation of *yfle wætan*; clearly body fluids are meant, but the compiler of *Bald’s Leechbook* does not seem to have equated them rigidly with the four physiological humours of the classical writers; and his *wætan* (literally ‘wet things’) does not always translate *humores*. *Peri didaxeon* sets out the classical theory more clearly:

feower wætun syndon on þan manniscen lichama ... þat ys þa wæte on þan heafode, 7 þæt blod on þara breosta, 7 se ruwa gealla on þan innoþe 7 se swerta gealle innan ðare blædran. And hyra angehwylce rixap ðra monþas

(There are four humours in the human body: that is the humours in the head, and the blood in the breast, and the rough bile in the intestines, and the black bile within the gall bladder. And each of these rules for three months ...) ¹²

In the later Middle Ages the theory was overelaborated,¹³ yet the idea that an excess of body fluids causes disease (though it confuses cause and effect) is quite logical. In illness we swell, we sweat, our eyes and nose run, our ears block up, we break out in oozing sores. The early physicians theorized that fluids increased internally also and caused such things as indigestion and hiccupping. According to Laurence Cameron, the *Bald’s Leechbook* compiler took his humoral references from many sources,¹⁴ but his concept of the theory was looser than that in his classical sources. That is to say, he altered and simplified it to something readily comprehensible. Though he does not seem to have extended it as an explanation to non-classical remedies, his own concept of it was clear and consistent.

Other causes of disease expressed in *Bald’s Leechbook* are all of attacks from outside, and the clearest and most frequent (though only cited about a quarter as often as evil humours) is from a “worm”. The word *wyrm* probably originally referred to a shape rather than to biological relationships: anything resembling a piece of string (or rope) could be considered a “worm”, whether it were a grub, an earthworm, or a snake.¹⁵ We still talk of a “bookworm” and “worm-eaten” furniture, and call a snakelike legless lizard a “slowworm”.

Any people living in unhygienic conditions would see intestinal worms of many kinds, passed in the faeces. Blowfly maggots can infest infected wounds, and squeezed-out blackheads and boils have the form if not the substance of worms. The next step, to imputing skin infections and the like to worms too small to be seen, is only slight: one charm in a twelfth-century manuscript commands a wen to become smaller than a handworm’s hip bone!¹⁶

Some chapter headings in the first book of *Bald’s Leechbook* illustrate this combination of easily observed worms with those that have been surmised: I.6: Læcedomas ... gif wyrm top ete ... (Remedies ... if a worm eat a tooth ...); I.45: Gif hwa gedrince wyrm on wætere (If anyone drink a worm in water); I.48: Læcedomas wiþ þam wyrmum þe innan eglað monnum; 7 wiþ wyrmum þe on cilda innoþe beop (Remedies for the worms that afflict men internally; and for the worms that are in children’s intestines); I.49: Læcedom on sundron anlipig wiþ þam smalan wyrme (A single remedy, separately, for the small worm [hair or threadworm?]); I.50: Læcedomas wiþ handwyrmum 7 deawwyrmum; 7 gif wyrm hand ete; waxsealf wiþ handwyrme: syx cræftas ealra, iiiii wisan (Remedies for handworms and dewworms; and if a worm eat the hand; a wax ointment for handworm: six examples in all, of four kinds); I.51: Læcedomas wiþ wyrmum þe monnes flæsc etaþ (Remedies for worms that eat a man’s flesh); I.53: Læcedomas twegen wiþ smoega wyrmum (Two remedies for penetrating worms); I.54: Læcedomas wið wyrmætum lice 7 cweldehtum (Remedies for a worm-eaten and mortified body).¹⁷

The third *Leechbook* (III.2.5, 3.1, 23, 39) and the *Lacnunga* (§§26, 27, 147) have similar remedies, including one each for a “penetrating worm” (III.29/§27), which Singer says was discussed in several “dark age medical texts” (including the *Medicina Plinii*, which was known to the Anglo-Saxons¹⁸) and which he equates with fistulous ulceration.¹⁹ Though he claimed that the idea of worms as a cause of disease came from Germanic origins (and indeed it occurs in the Babylonian charms²⁰), in these Anglo-Saxon medical texts it seems to have come from the Latin sources. The *Herbarium of Apuleius* frequently specifies herbs against intestinal and other worms.²¹

Other explanations for disease are only rarely found in *Bald’s Leechbook*. For example, book I, chapter 45 is concerned with poisons, and one kind is characterized as “flying”:

Wiþ fleogendum atre 7 ælcum æternum swile: on Frigidæge afwer buteran þe sie gemolcen of anes bleos nytne oððe hinde 7 ne sie wiþ wætre gemenged. Asing ofer nigon sîpum letania 7 nigon sîpum Pater Noster 7 nigon sîpum þis gealdor: Acræ Þæt deah to ælcum 7 huru to deopum dolgum.

(For flying poison and every poisoned swelling: on Friday churn butter that is milked from a cow or a hind of one colour and not mixed with water. Sing over it a litany, nine times, and nine times the Pater Noster, and nine times this charm: Acræ That is good for every sore and even for deep ones.)²²

A later chapter explains:

I.72: Blodlæs is to organne fiftyne nihtum ær Hlafmæsse 7 æfter fif 7 britig nihtum forpon bonne ealle æterno þing fleogap 7 mannum swiþe deriað.

(Bloodletting is to be avoided for fifteen nights before Lammes, and after it for thirty-five nights because then all poisonous things are flying, and hurt men severely.)

It goes on to state that the Romans and other southerners made “earth houses” for themselves, to avoid the dangerous winds at this time of year, so that this, too, must be ultimately from a Mediterranean source.²³

However, the same idea appears in the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” in the *Lacnunga* (§§79-81), where the terms *attor* ‘poison’ and *onflyge* ‘flier’ are complementary:

Nu magon þas viiiii wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum
 wið viiiii attrum 7 wið nygon onflygnum:
 wið ðy readan attre, wið ðy runlan attre,
 wið ðy hwitan attre, wið ðy [hæw]enan attre,
 wið ðy geolwan attre, wið ðy grenan attre,
 wið ðy wonnan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,
 wið ðy brunan attre, wið ðy basewan attre; ...
 gif ænig attor eastan fleogan,
 oððe ænig norðan cume,
 oððe ænig westan ofer werðeode.

(Now these nine herbs are strong against nine fugitives from glory [evil spirits?]
 against nine poisons and against nine fliers;
 against the red poison, against the foul poison,
 against the white poison, against the purple poison,
 against the yellow poison, against the green poison,
 against the dark poison, against the blue poison,
 against the brown poison, against the crimson poison ...
 If any poison flying from the east
 or any from the north come
 or any from the west over the race of men.)²⁴

In the same charm, mugwort and plantain are said to be “strong against poison, against ‘onfliers’, and against the hated thing that goes through the land”.

What were these “fliers” thought to be? Cockayne and medical historians after him²⁵ apparently took them to be epidemic viruses, which (since they pass from one person to another) might well have been imagined as blowing about in the air.²⁶ However, the coupling of flying poison with swelling, discoloration, and sores in the Old English texts points rather to bacterial infection, which is indeed airborne in dirt and dust, and makes some wounds turn bad but not others,²⁷ and produces boils for no obvious reason. Moreover, at least one of the herbs said to be good against “fliers”, plantain, has antibiotic activity against many bacteria when crushed.²⁸

Possession by a devil is another explanation of disease found once or twice in *Bald’s Leechbook*. A chapter heading reads:

I.63: Læcedomas wið feondseocum men; drencas to þon 7 hu mon scyle mæssan 7 gebedu 7 sealmas ofer þone drenc singan 7 of ciricbellum drincan; 7 wiþ bræcseocum men 7 wiþ wedenheorte; 7 wið þon eallum sex cræftas.

(Remedies for a devil-sick man; drinks for that, and how one must sing masses and prayers and psalms over the drink and drink it from a church bell; and for an epileptic, and for the mad heart; and, for that, six examples in all.)²⁹

The chapter itself defines what “devil-sick” means: “Wiþ feondseocum men, bonne deofol þone monnan fede oððe hine innan gewealde mid adle” (For a demoniac, when a devil nourishes/supports a man or controls him from within with-disease).³⁰ The four (not six) remedies suggested are herbal drinks, three of which contain holy water; all oppose the power of the church to the disease. In the *Apuleius* complex mugwort (§11),³¹ *smerowyrt* (§20.2),³² mandrake (§132.4),³³ and the greater periwinkle (§179)³⁴ and, in the *Medicina de quadrupedibus*, wolf’s flesh (§10.1) are all prescribed against devil-sickness.

From symptoms described in some miracles in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*³⁵ and Felix’s *Life of Guthlac*³⁶ it seems that both homicidal schizophrenia and epilepsy could be considered devil-possession. Sometimes we can get clues about what is meant either from the Latin source, or from the context in which the disease is mentioned. Wolf’s flesh is also said to be good “wið yfelre gesihðe” (for a bad vision), and the remedy ends “þa scinlac be him ær ætywdon, ne geunstillæd hy hine” (the apparition that appeared to him will not disturb him). In *Bald’s Leechbook* (II.1) *feonda adl* once translates *spasmos*, which can mean convulsions.³⁷ Another *Bald’s Leechbook* chapter (I.66) begins: “Wiþ ungemynde 7 wiþ dysgunge” (For dementia and for foolishness [idiocy? senility?]). The remedy is so similar to those for devil-sickness that the disease must certainly also be very similar.

When we put this all together, it seems that the term *devil-sickness* is used for illnesses that turn the minds and affect the bodies of the sufferers, so that they lose control. Not surprisingly (since there are no medical cures), it appears in descriptions of miracles rather than in medical texts.

In the third *Leechbook* one chapter heading (III.64) reads: “Wiþ deofle lîpe drenc 7 ungemynde 7 wiþ deofles costunga” (A light drink for [against] the devil, and dementedness, and against the devil’s *costunga*).³⁸ Cockayne and the new *Dictionary of Old English* translate *costunga* here as “temptations”, but the remedies suggested under this heading so resemble those for devil-sickness cited above that surely *costunga* must here mean something like “afflictions, tribulations, torments”,³⁹ and

be equivalent to madness, epilepsy, or perhaps senile dementia (Alzheimer's disease).

The idea of an attack by an elf may be a relic of beliefs older than devil-possession.⁴⁰ It is most clearly expressed in the metrical charm "Wip færstice" (For sudden stitch), *Lacnunga* 134-35, where a magic ritual is used to combat the sudden onset of an illness (perhaps something like lumbago in humans, bloat or the effect of warble flies in cattle) characterized as a shot by something supernatural – the old gods, elves, or a *hægtesse* (perhaps originally a tutelary goddess) – all of which were degraded in concept, often to devils, after the coming of Christianity:

gif hit wære esa gescot, oððe hit wære ylfa gescot,
oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot, nu ic wille ðin helpan.
Pis ðe to bote esa gescotes; ðis ðe to bote ylfa gescotes;
ðis ðe to bote hægtessan gescotes: ic ðin wille helpan.
(If it be shot of the old gods, or it be the shot of elves
or it be the shot of a *hægtesse*, now I will help you.)
This will be a remedy for you for the gods' shot, this for you as a remedy for
the elves' shot,
This as a remedy for you for the shot of the *hægtesse*: I will help you.)⁴¹

The supernatural beings are seen as shooting arrows into their victim.

The same idea is implicit in remedies for a "shot" horse or other farm animal in the *Lacnunga* (§§118, 164), and in *Bald's Leechbook* (I.88, II.65),⁴² where one sentence proves the identity of the concept: "Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie, pis him mæg to bote" (Be the elf whatever it may, this will be a good remedy for it).⁴³

A remedy in the *Lacnunga* (§29) shows that the effect of affliction by the devil and by an elf must be very similar. It begins: "Pis is se halga drænc wið ælfsideinne 7 wið eallum feondes costungum" (This is the holy drink against elfin influence [?] and all afflictions of the devil). Grattan and Singer call this a "Christian Ritual against Elves", and it does oppose the power of the church to what it considered devilish. The word *ælfside* is also found in *Bald's Leechbook* I.64: "Wip ælcre yfelre leodrunan 7 wið ælfsideinne" (Against each evil *leodrune* and against "elfin influence"). Again, Christian magic (in the form of some Greek letters to be written) is opposed to the affliction, whether it be in humans or in cattle. In the chapter heading, the remedy is called "fefercynnes gealdor" (an incantation for a kind of fever).⁴⁴ Moreover, in some glosses *ylfige*, 'elfy', translates *comitiales*, 'epileptics'.⁴⁵

In the *Lacnunga* a dwarf and an elf may be considered as equivalent, for two of its remedies (§§87-88) begin: "Writ ðis ondlang ða earmas wið dweorh" (Write this along the arms against dwarf), and one (§93): "Wið

dweorh". The first two formulae (which are identical except that the second is longer), resemble that for *ælfside*, and consist of Greek letters and two saints' names to be written on the arms, combined with a potion of celandine grated into ale.⁴⁶ The third remedy uses "vii. lytle oflætan swylice man mid ofrað" (seven little wafers such as are used in the Mass) inscribed with the names of the Seven Sleepers, hung around the neck, and the singing of a metrical charm, so combining traditional and Christian magic.⁴⁷ The naming of the Seven Sleepers, and the implication in the incantation that a creature was "riding" the victim, indicate some kind of feverish illness producing delirium.

In the *Peri didaxeon* (§51) it is stated of an asthmatic: "Hwile he riþab swylice he on dueorge sy" (At times he writhes as if he were in [suffering from?] a dwarf), and in the *Medicina de quadrupedibus* there is:

10.17: Dweorg on weg to donne, hwites hundes post gecnucadne to duste 7 [gemænged] wið meolowe 7 [to] cicle abacen; syle etan pam untruman men ær þære tide hys tocymes, swa on dæge swa on nihte swærper hyt sy, his togang bið ðearle strang; æfter þam he lytlæd 7 onweg gewiteþ.
(To get rid of a dwarf, the excrement of a white dog crushed to a powder and mixed with meal and baked as a cake; give the sick man to eat before the time of its arrival, by day or night whichever it be; its access is exceedingly strong; and after that it diminishes and departs.)⁴⁸

Clearly this is some kind of illness with periodic attacks, and the fact that this remedy is followed by others for skin disease suggested recrudescent typhus to Sandmann.⁴⁹ Its attribution to a malign spirit would then be readily understandable – as well as the attempt to drive it away with a disgusting medicine.

The third *Leechbook* three times uses names incorporating the word "elf" for diseases; in chapter 62 they are *ælfadl*, which is not described, and *ælfsgogoda*, 'elf-hiccup', for which, unusually, a number of symptoms are given:

III.62: Gif him biþ ælfsgogoda, him beoþ þa eagan geolwe þær hi reade beon sceoldon. Gif þu bone mon lacnian wille þanc his gebæra 7 wite hwilces hades he sie. Gif hit biþ wæpnedman 7 locað up þonne þu hine ærest sceawast 7 se andwlita biþ geolwe blac, bone mon þu meaht gelacnian æltæwlice gif he ne biþ þeron to lange. Gif hit bið wif 7 locað niþer þonne þu hit ærest sceawast, 7 hire andwlita biþ reade wan, þær þu miht eac gelacnian. Gif hit bið dægþerne leng on þonne .xii. monap 7 sio onsyn biþ pyslicu þonne meaht þu hine betan to hwile, 7 ne meaht þu hwæpere æltæwlice gelacnian.

(If they have elf-hiccup, their eyes are yellow where they should be red. If you wish to treat them, consider their manner, and take heed of what sex they are. If it is a male, and he is looking up when you first observe him, and his face is pale yellow, you can cure him completely, if he has not been suffering too long. If it is a woman, and she is looking down when you first observe her, and her

face is dark red, you can also cure her. If it is present for a day longer than twelve months and the complexion is thus, then you can improve it for a time; however, you cannot completely cure it.)

This seems to be chronic liver disease.⁵⁰ Both *ælfadl* and *ælfsgoða* need Christian magic to combat them; and the latter remedy concludes “This device is strong against every affliction of the enemy (*wip ælcre feondes costunge*).”

The symptoms of the other disease, called *wæter ælfadl* (chapter 63), were that the fingernails were dark (OE *wann*) and the eyes tearful, and the patient looked down. The remedy is a herb drink made with holy water and beer, and an incantation without any obvious Christian element, whose grammar and sense are uncertain but indicate that other symptoms were sores rapidly growing worse, and earache.⁵¹

In *Leechbook* III.61 there are these instructions:

Wyrc sealfe wip ælcynne 7 nihtgengan 7 þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oppe ælf oppe nihtgengan
(Make a salve against the elfin race and nightwalkers and the persons with whom the devil has intercourse If a bad affliction or an elf or nightwalkers happen to a person)⁵²

The fact that this is an ointment, imbued with Christian magic, rather than a potion, indicates that the threat was felt to be external. The reference to “nightwalkers” may be taken in conjunction with a statement in *Maxims I* implying that anyone (or anything?) moving about at night was automatically suspect.⁵³ As for those cohabiting with the devil, there is no reason to suppose them exclusively female, as Cockayne did. However, we may be in the world of the woman in the “Cotton Gnostic Verse” (*Maxims II*) who was probably working love-magic.⁵⁴ Again, the context is of creatures outside the normal world of the village: the thief who goes about in bad weather, the *þyrs* who lives in the fen. So perhaps the salve was to be put on at night, to protect the fearful from elves, the “nightwalkers” (like Grendel?), and humans who were up to no good (seeking out illicit and maybe even demon lovers)⁵⁵ and who might take vengeance on anyone who heard and/or saw them. The salve, then, was probably to prevent fear itself, rather than illness.

One of the entries for sow thistle in the *Herbarium* corroborates this:

111.2: Wip þæt ðu nane yfele geancymas ðe ne ondræde genim þas ylcyan wyrte carduum silfaticum ... 7 heald hy mid þe, swa lange swa ðu hy mid þe byrst nanwiht yfeles þe ongean cymeð.
(So that you should not fear any evil encounters take this plant *carduus silvaticus* ... and keep it on you; so long as you carry it with you nothing evil will come to meet you.)⁵⁶

Finally, in *Leechbook* III.1 three chelidonium stones, taken from the crop of swallow nestlings, are recommended as amulets:

Hi beop gode wip heafodece 7 wip eagwærce 7 wip feondes costunga 7 nihtgengan 7 lenctenadle 7 maran 7 wyrtforbore 7 malsgra 7 yflum gealdor-cræftum.

(They are good for headache and eye pain and afflictions of the devil and nightwalkers and malaria and nightmare and *wyrtforbor* and fascination and evil enchantments.)⁵⁷

For Pliny and his successors chelidonium stones were specific against epilepsy;⁵⁸ but Grattan and Singer⁵⁹ suggest that the source here is Marcellus Empiricus, for whom the stones are good for eye pains and quartan fevers (malaria); in either case, the Anglo-Saxons have added much to the list, the connection between them being, perhaps, hallucinations. Here we may have the link between black magic (evil enchantments) and illness that seems missing elsewhere. Grattan and Singer comment:

The A.S. writer seems here to be seeking to assimilate his native magic to that of the south. *Wyrtforbor* is a *hapax legomenon*. It means literally “plant restrained” – “herb-bound” as we might say – and seems to be an attempt to render the Mediterranean idea of *defixio*, a magic knot, as found both in the pseudo-Apuleius and in the writings of the real Apuleius *Malsgra* is doubtless an abbreviation and misreading of *malstrunga* [sic] “bewitchment” Finally, *gealdor* is a common word always associated with singing for a magic purpose.

Afflictions of the devil, nightwalkers, malaria, and nightmares may all be either the cause or result of hallucinations; might then some of the last terms (as well as evil enchantments) refer to black magic? *Leechbook* I.45 has a reference to the condition *wyrtforbor*, in a chapter dealing with various kinds of poison:

Gif mon sie wyrтum forboren sele springwyrt þæt he ete 7 halig wæter supe. Wip þon þe mon sie forboren: gif he hæsp on him scyttisc weax, þa smalan attorlaðan oððe on awylдум ealað drince, ne mæg hine wyrтum forberan.
(If anyone is bound by herbs, give him “springwort” [caper spurge, *Euphorbia lathyris*]⁶⁰ to eat and let him sip holy water. In case anyone is bound, if he has on him Scottish wax and the small “poisonhater” or drink it in boiled ale, he cannot be bound by herbs.)⁶¹

Cockayne believed that the binding was against sexual intercourse;⁶² this ties in with some evidence from the *Apuleius* complex concerning lion’s foot (§8.1): “Gyf hwa on þære untrumnyssse sy þæt he sy cis, þonne meaht ðu hine unbindan ...” (If anyone is in the infirmity that he is bound, then you can unbind him ...), of which the Latin version reads “Si quis devotus defixusque fuerit, sic eum resolvis” (If anyone is bewitched and

enchanted, release him thus).⁶³ A remedy in the *Medicina de quadrupedibus* (§1.10) recommends eating boiled badger testicles: "Gif hwam hwæt yfæles gedon bið, þæt he ne mæge hys wynlusta brucan" (If something evil is done to someone, so that he cannot enjoy his sexual pleasure), translating "Item si quid malefactum fuerit et non potuerit rebus veneriis uti" (Likewise if something bad has been done, and he has not been able to use his sexual parts).⁶⁴

As mentioned above, there is evidence for Anglo-Saxon love-magic. In the early penitentials a seven-year penance is prescribed for someone who kills another by means of a philtre or some device,⁶⁵ and parallels in church councils show that such manslaughters were caused by herbal potions intended to alter the affections one way or another. In the late Old English penitentials an elaborate system of penances is prescribed for laymen and graded clerics "hwa wiccige ymbon oðres lufu" (who work witchcraft on account of love of another).⁶⁶ In his homily *De auguriis*, Ælfric claims that some women make drinks for their wooers, or do some wickedness, so that the men may marry them.⁶⁷

There is also the word *leodrune*⁶⁸ (already encountered in *Bald's Leechbook* I.44), which probably originally denoted a tutelary goddess, later (like *haegtesse*) downgraded to mean "witch". Here, then, is another hint that the Anglo-Saxons may have feared a witch, but not necessarily because she might enchant them into illness. In fact, though there may be good reason for using magic to kill, or to alter the affections, there seems little point in using deliberate, time-consuming magic to leave a victim ill but alive so that he can become vindictive in turn. The reason that black magic is so seldom found as a cause of disease may well be that only an unsuccessful attempt at death- or love-magic produced illness.

However, anthropologists use the word *witchcraft* in another way: for an emanation from certain gifted or afflicted human beings who transmit their feelings of envy in such a way that their victims suffer physically. The nearest thing in Europe to the "witchcraft" of the modern African Azande appears to be the concept of the evil eye;⁶⁹ and the only written evidence for it as a possible cause of disease in Anglo-Saxon England is Asser's statement about the illness that came on King Alfred during his wedding festivities:

Ch. 74: Multi namque favore et fascinatione circumstantis populi hoc factum esse autumabant; alii diaboli quadam invidia, qui semper bonis invidus existat; alii inusitato quodam genere febris; alii ficum existimabant, quod genus infestissimi doloris etiam ab infantia habuit.

(Many, to be sure, alleged that it had happened (*favore et fascinatione*) of the people around him; others, through the ill-will of the devil, who is always envious of good men; others, that it was the result of some unfamiliar kind of fever;

still others thought that it was due to the piles, because he had suffered this particular kind of agonizing irritation even from his youth.)⁷⁰

Fascinatio is the regular Latin word in this period for the evil eye,⁷¹ most to be feared when a group of envious persons is about, and especially by brides and grooms.⁷² *Favor* means "influence"; it is often taken to be erroneous here,⁷³ but it has been suggested to me that the phrase means "by the influence of the evil eye".⁷⁴ In the Old English glosses *fascinatio* is translated *malscrung*,⁷⁵ which is found in one of the lists of evil things in the "Nine Herbs Charm" in the *Lacnunga* (80):

Stond heo wið wærce, stunað heo wið attre,
seo mæg wið iii 7 wið xxx,
wið feondes hond 7 wið freab[r]egde
wið malscrunge minra wihta.

Unfortunately the passage appears corrupt at several points, and a translation can only be tentative:

It [the remedy] stands against pain, it rushes against poison,
it is strong against three and against thirty,
against the hand of the enemy and against a mighty device,
against the evil eye of mean creatures.⁷⁶

The word *malscra*, found in a list of evil things in the *Leechbook III* amulet prescription concerning chelidonium stones quoted above, is probably an abbreviation of *malscrung*. Jente connects the Old English word with the root found in Old Saxon *malsk* 'proud', and the Old High German cognate *mascrunc* glosses *fascinatio*, *laus stulta*.⁷⁷ An Old English gloss also equates *fascinatio* with *laus stulta*, literally 'foolish praise', probably referring to the common superstition that to overpraise something puts a curse on it. When it is a child, and the praise might be a cover for envy, a parent may well resort to prophylactic measures. Finally, a passage in the *Herbarium* (§11) concerning mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris* L.), a literal translation from Latin, is also evidence that the concept of the evil eye was known in late Anglo-Saxon England:

... 7 eac heo afligð deofulseocnyssa 7 on þam huse þe he hy inne hæfð heo forbyt yfele lacnunga 7 eac heo awendedð yfelra manna eagan.
(... and also it expels devil-sickness, and in the house that has it within it prevents bad medicines, and also it turns aside the eyes of evil men.)⁷⁸

The written evidence is therefore slight, but it seems to me supported by some ornaments found with Anglo-Saxon women in the pagan- and early Christian-period burials, which may well have had a prophylactic function. T.C. Lethbridge claimed that single beads found with infants were probably amulets against the evil eye;⁷⁹ more convincing are some of the later pagan-period glass and paste beads, which very often have

trailed designs very reminiscent of eyes – one found at Welbeck Hill in Lincolnshire is quite naturalistic.⁸⁰ From early Egypt onwards amulets in the form of an open eye were believed to return the first, dangerous glance back upon the fascinator.

Another kind of evil eye amulet, well known, for example, in Pompeii, is one that shocks, for it can distract the dangerous glance to itself, and away from the vulnerable wearer. The developed cruciform brooches, also of the later pagan period in England, might exemplify this. They are always illustrated in archaeological tomes⁸¹ with the wider part, covering the spring, at the top, and with the narrow termination, sometimes clearly a formalized horse's head, at the bottom. However, the Anglo-Saxon women wore these the other way up; and what looks like a horse's head in the decorous modern volumes, sometimes looks very like an erect phallus when reversed. We cannot take these objects as proof that the Anglo-Saxons believed in the evil eye from pagan times onward, still less that they warded off the illness it might cause with such prophylactics, but in view of the common European belief in the evil eye, and the Roman connection between it and the penis, they make one very suspicious.

To conclude: as with much study of Anglo-Saxon medicine before the modern enlightened age, scholars have been too ready to seize on residual elements of pagan superstition in Anglo-Saxon medicine. If, however, we search out the Anglo-Saxons' considered statements on the causes of illness, we find that they were based on scholarship, observation, and reasoning. Too much cold, too much heat, then as now, may be succeeded by a recognizable disease. Some body fluids obviously increase in illness; is it not logical that they might cause the disease? Wormlike parasites visibly infest the body; is it not logical that other worms too tiny to see might also be responsible for other conditions? And indeed, if we translate *wyrm* as "parasite" instead of "worm", there is very little difference between their concept and ours. Nor is there a great gulf between the Anglo-Saxon idea of flying venom and our idea of germs.

If we believe (as the Christian Anglo-Saxons did) that the devil is always lying in wait to do harm, is it not a convenient explanation of mysterious maladies that make the sufferer behave abnormally, that the devil has temporarily taken control? And that the way in which this devil-possession was described and combatted should sometimes show traces of earlier beliefs in attacks by semisupernatural spirits like elves and dwarves, which the church would have considered devilish? It is, indeed, only in the metrical charms that elves are shown taking action to cause illness; elsewhere in the medical texts we only deduce their involvement by the name of the disease. Elves as a cause of illness in

Anglo-Saxon medicine are residual, in the same way that, in the Yorkshire Dales fifty years ago, the local farmers were still telling vets that a cow not responding to their medicines was suffering from a worm in the tail.⁸²

To put it another way, for the Anglo-Saxons imbalance and "evil humours" affected the human constitution, parasitic worms the flesh, and evil spirits the mind. As for the use of magic in medicine: if our sources are to be trusted it was quite frequently used in healing,⁸³ very seldom in attempting to cause disease. No doubt black magic belonged to the Anglo-Saxon thought-world, but it is always a difficult and demanding skill,⁸⁴ and is more likely to have been used for a specific purpose, such as to remove someone inconvenient, or to alter the abilities of a rival or the affections of a desired or undesired lover. Only by accident might it make a person ill.

Use of the evil eye – or the anthropologists' idea of witchcraft – is a different matter. It requires no preparation, and may well be the result of a momentary impulse of envy, perhaps even involuntarily. The persons overlooked may fall ill, because they believe themselves attacked, or perhaps even because of a guilty conscience.

That is probably a good note to end on. The Anglo-Saxons were, like ourselves, complex human beings, creatures of emotion and impulse and ready to believe that the world is full of more creatures than are envisaged in any logical philosophy, but also capable of arguing rationally and comprehending a system with different kinds of causes for different kinds of diseases.⁸⁵

Notes

1. J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, eds, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (London 1952), p. 92. Section numbers of the *Lacnunga* cited in this paper are taken from this edition.
2. Ed. as a whole by T. Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, Rolls Series 35, 3 vols (London 1864-66). This contains, in vol. I: the *Herbarium of Apuleius Platonicus* (pp. 1-325), *Medicina de quadrupedibus* (pp. 326-73), and marginal remedies (pp. 374-405); in vol. II: *Bald's Leechbook* (pp. 1-298) and *Leechbook III* (pp. 300-60); in vol. III: *Lacnunga* (pp. 2-80), *Peri didaxeon* (pp. 82-145), and various marginal remedies and prognostics, etc. (pp. 144-295).
3. *Herbarium* 2.9, 117.5, 135.4, 137.1, 148.3, 173.4; *Medicina de quadrupedibus* 5.15. For these texts the best edition is H. J. de Vriend, *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de quadrupedibus*, EETS o.s. 286 (London 1984), and the numbering used here follows this edition.

4. *Herbarium* 4.8, 90.13, 100.4, 135.4, 147.3, 174.1. The number of remedies for snakebite also seems excessive: 28 plants (out of 185), and parts of 3 animals (out of 14) are prescribed against snakes.
5. Ed. B. Schauman and A. Cameron, "A Newly-Found Leaf of Old English from Louvain", *Anglia* 95 (1977) 289-312. The Omont leaf is now in the Université catholique at Louvain-la-Neuve (Centre général de documentation, Fragmenta H. Omont 3).
6. Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 172-73 (heading; text of chapter lost).
7. Nigel Barley, "Anglo-Saxon Magico-Medicine", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 3 no. 2 (1972) 67-76 at 68. Another view is put forward by W.H.R. Rivers, *Medicine, Magic, and Religion* (London 1924), esp. pp. 1-80.
8. Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II and III, passim, in margins.
9. C.H. Talbot, "Some Notes on Anglo-Saxon Medicine", *Medical History* 9 (1965) 156-69; *Medicine in Medieval England* (London 1967), esp. pp. 11-23.
10. M.L. Cameron, "The Sources of Medical Knowledge in Anglo-Saxon England", *ASE* 11 (1983) 135-55; "Bald's *Leechbook*: Its Sources and their Use in its Compilation", *ASE* 12 (1983) 153-82.
11. See the discussion in my "Variant Versions of Old English Medical Remedies and the Compilation of *Bald's Leechbook*", *ASE* 13 (1984) 235-64 at 261-62.

The most probable source for the cough passage is the Latin Alexander of Tralles (*Practica Alexandri* 2.1: "De tussi Initum habet modo a calida distemperantia, modo a frigida aut humida aut sicca" (Concerning cough The illness has its beginning sometimes from heat, sometimes from cold, sometimes from damp, and sometimes from dryness).

My debt to Professor M.L. Cameron, who suggested these sources, is enormous: this paper would lack scholarly apparatus without his help. The *Practica Alexandri* is only available in 16th-century editions: see Cameron, *ASE* 11, p. 141, n. 23; T. Puschmann, ed. and trans., *Alexander von Tralles*, 2 vols (Vienna 1878-79), I, 99.

12. The head humours are said to rule from mid-December to mid-March, blood from March to June, rough bile from June to September, and black bile from September to December. The *Peri didaxeon* is (according to Cameron, personal communication February 1989) "a translation and adaptation, with additions, of the *Petrocellus*; see Max Löweneck, ed., *Peri didaxeon, eine Sammlung von Rezepten in englischer Sprache aus dem 11./12. Jahrhundert*, Erlanger Beiträge zur englischen Philologie und vergleichenden Litteraturgeschichte 12 (1896), pp. vi-vii, 2-3".

Byrhtferth (early in the 11th century) expresses the concept of the humours clearly in a non-medical context (*Byrhtferth's Manual*, ed. S.J. Crawford, EETS o.s. 177 [London 1929], pp. 10-12), agreeing with classical ideas; see Rudolph E. Siegel, *Galen's System of Physiology and Medicine* (Basel and New York 1968), pp. 216-24.

13. See John M. Riddle, "Theory and Practice in Medieval Medicine", *Viator* 5 (1974) 157-84, esp. pp. 172-74.

14. M.L. Cameron, personal communication February 1989. Professor Cameron has kindly supplied the following sources for the passages in *Bald's Leechbook* concerning the humours. For reasons of space, citations of editions and quotations from texts will usually not be given here. I.1.13: Oribasius, *Euporistes* 4.5; Cameron, *ASE* 11, pp. 138-39. I.1.16: *Physica Plinii Bambergensis* (ed. A. Örnérforss [Hildesheim 1975]) 1.1. "This is one of the clearest examples showing that *wete* meant 'wet things' as well as *humor*", since *wætan* in *Bald's Leechbook* refers to *materia* in *Physica Plinii Bambergensis*, not to physiological humours. I.2.1: (Last line on p. 26 to end of section): "This expands a simple statement in *Physica Plinii Bambergensis* 17.1". I.15.1: *Practica Alexandri* 2.1; Cameron, *ASE* 11, pp. 141-2. I.18.1: "This chapter comes ultimately, through some intermediate form, from Galen, and follows his opinions quite closely; see G.C. Kühn, *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* (Leipzig 1827), vol. 14, pp. 363, 371-2, 374, 451"; Cameron, *ASE* 11, p. 137. I.31.5: No sources discovered. I.35: *Bald's Leechbook* follows its Latin sources closely: *Passionarius Galeni* (Lyon 1526), 5.34-35 and 44 (Cameron, *ASE* 11, p. 143; *ASE* 12, pp. 162-63, 171). I.42: No clear source. I.72: No direct source. "Everything in it was common knowledge of the day. The humours are the physiological humours". II.1.1-2: Direct translation of *Practica Alexandri* 1.14 and 36-37 (Cameron, *ASE* 11, pp. 141-42). II.15-17, 25-30.1, 38-39, 42: "Most of this is from *Practica Alexandri* also". II.56.4: "Closely related to *Passionarius Galeni* III.15, 16, 17; the words *wib blod* 7 *wib oman* being related to *Passionarius Galeni sanguinem cum phlegmate mistum*. There is no mention in either text of humours per se: *oman* means 'inflammatory materials' (a translation of *phlegma*, through a confusion with *flegmon* meaning 'inflammation' or 'swelling')". II.59.1-2: "Taken mostly from the Petrocellus-Liber Tertius complex, with some connections with Alexander of Tralles"; Cameron, *ASE* 12, pp. 162-66. III.12: Self-explanatory.
15. Clearly the word's meaning was extended in Old English and it is at times used for all kinds of invertebrates, e.g. in hexaemeral literature and in the *Herbarium of Apuleius* (see examples listed in nn. 3 and 4). The *Herbarium* also uses *næddre* for spiders and scorpions, e.g. 90.13, 117.5, 135.4, 147.3. This extension may be partly due to the fact that grubs turn into insects, partly to the lack of a general OE word for invertebrates, partly to the difficulty of classifying creatures not known in England.
16. Felix Grendon, ed., "Anglo-Saxon Charms", *Journal of American Folklore* 22 (1909) 105-237, no. A3, p. 167, nn. p. 216; Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (henceforth ASPR) 6 (New York and London 1942), no. 12, p. 128; G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague 1948), no. 4, pp. 154-59. J.F. Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times* (Oxford 1904), pp. 44-45, conjectures that hand-worm and "dewworm" (infecting the feet) are terms for the itch-mite (*Acarus scabei*).
17. See also Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 50, 114, 120-26.
18. Cameron, *ASE* 11, p. 142 and n. 24; *ASE* 12, pp. 161, 180-81.

19. Fistulas look like worms, spreading along channels under the skin (and "were still called *Wurm* in Germany until recently"; M.L. Cameron, personal communication February 1989).
20. R. Campbell Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, 2 vols (London 1903-04), II, 160-63.
21. E.g. *Herbarium* 2.10, 5.1, 46.3, 65.1, 92.1, 97.3, 102.2, 112.1, 137.2, 156.1; see also *Medicina de quadrupedibus* 3.5.
22. Also in Grendon, "Charms", B7, pp. 196-97, 230; and in Storms, *Magic*, no. 79, p. 306. Another salve with herbs (over which a mass is to be sung), honey, and butter is described in *Lacnunga* 18, headed "Sealf wið fleogendum atre 7 færspryngum" (A salve for flying poison and sudden ulcers); §133 also uses Christian magic against flying poison.
23. E.g. Varro writes (1.12): "Advertendum etiam, si qua erunt loca palustria ... quod crescunt animalia quaedam minuta, quae non possunt oculi consequi, et per aera intus in corpus per os ac nares pervenient atque efficiunt difficilis morbos" (Precautions must also be taken in the neighbourhood of swamps ... because there are bred certain minute creatures which cannot be seen by the eyes, which float through the air and enter the body through the mouth and the nose and there cause serious diseases). *Marcus Porcius Cato, On Agriculture*; *Marcus Terentius Varro, On Agriculture*, ed. and trans. William D. Hooper, rev. H.B. Ash (London and Cambridge, Mass. 1934), pp. 208-09.
24. Also in Grendon, "Charms", B4, pp. 190-95, 226-29; Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, no. 2, pp. 119-21; Storms, *Magic*, no. 9, pp. 186-97; and in Gert Sandmann, *Studien zu altenglischen Zaubersprüchen* (Münster, Ph.D. diss. 1975), pp. 192-235.
25. Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, I, xxxviii; Payne, *English Medicine*, p. 43.
26. Bede, *De natura rerum* 37, "De pestilentia", ed. J.-P. Migne, *Venerabilis Bedae opera omnia*, Patrologia Latina (henceforth PL) 90 (Turnholt 1844), cols 187-279 at 256-57, takes from Isidore and Galen the idea that pestilence is produced from the air corrupted from excess of dryness or heat or from rain; see Wilfrid Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England* (London 1963), p. 56.
27. E.g. see Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975), pp. 1-6.
28. M.L. Cameron, "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Magic", ASE 17 (1988) 191-215 at 205-06.
29. Similar passages in Bald's *Leechbook* are in II.65 and 66.
30. For the meaning of *fede* see J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1st edn 1898, suppl. 1921); *The Blickling Homilies*, ed. R. Morris, EETS o.s. 58, 63, 73 (Oxford 1874-80), no. IV, p. 41, l. 28 has "Seo cyrice sceal fedan þa þe æt hire eardiaþ" (The church shall nourish/protect those who dwell in her).
31. *Mugcwyrt, artemesia*, now *Artemisia vulgaris* L.; see de Vriend, *Herbarium*, p. 290.
32. *Smerowyrt, aristolochia*, now *Aristolochia rotunda* L. or *A. clematitis* L. (heartwort or birthwort); de Vriend, *Herbarium*, p. 292.
33. *Mandragora*, now *Atropa mandragora* L.; ibid., pp. 317-18.

34. *Priapisci, vinca pervinca*, now *Vinca major* L.; ibid., p. 327.
35. *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.11, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford 1969), p. 248.
36. Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge 1956), ch. 41, pp. 126-31, nn. p. 188. See also Bonser, *Medical Background*, ch. 16, pp. 257-63; and Stanley Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine* (Newton Abbot 1974), pp. 77-79. The Romans also considered epilepsy to be caused by evil spirits; see W.H.S. Jones, "Ancient Roman Folk Medicine", *Journal of the History of Medicine* 12 (1957) 459-72 at 465.
37. M.L. Cameron (personal communication) gives the source as *Practica Alexander* 2.14.
38. *Leechbook* III.58 is headed "Wip feondes costunge", and Cockayne translates "Against temptations of the fiend". The remedy is to have a plant, *rud molin* (unidentifiable), about you, and then the devil cannot harm you.
39. The meaning "to try (someone) with afflictions" is established for the verbs (*ge*)*costian*, (*ge*)*costnian* (sense 1.a.ii), and "tried with afflictions" for (*ge*)*costnod* (1.a.i). (*Ge*)*costung, costnung* translates *tribulatio* in biblical texts, and appears to bear the meaning "affliction" in some citations under sense 2.a, "temptation as storm, weapon, heat etc." as well as in the medical texts (*Dictionary of Old English*, ed. Ashley Crandell Amos and Antonette diPaolo Healey, Fascicle C [Toronto 1988]).
40. The idea that God permits the devil to test humans with afflictions also underlies Ælfric's *De auguriis* homily; see ll. 166-73 in *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2 vols, EETS o.s. 76, 82 (London 1881-85), I, 364-83 at 376-77. See my discussion in "Ælfric's Use of his Sources in his Homily on Auguries", *English Studies* 66 (1985) 477-95 at 489-90 and 494.
41. Grendon, "Charms," A1, pp. 164-67, 214-15; Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, no. 4, pp. 122-23; Storms, *Magic*, no. 2, pp. 140-51. In the *Lorica of Gildas* (*Lacnunga* 68) black devils are envisaged as shooting arrows into the side of the petitioner; the distinction between elves shooting and devils possessing their victims is therefore not rigid. Evil spirits as agents of disease are already found in *Babylonia*: see Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits*, I, 2-29.
42. Bald's *Leechbook* II.65; also in Grendon, "Charms," E2, pp. 208-09, 235. The term used is *ofscoten* in Bald's *Leechbook*, *gescoten* in the *Lacnunga*, and is not elsewhere used for humans.
43. The quotation is from II.65; later in the same chapter is another remedy "Wip ælfse", also in Grendon, "Charms", E14, pp. 212-13, 237.
44. Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 14; the charm is also in Grendon, "Charms", D8, pp. 202-03, 233; and in Storms, *Magic*, no. 32, pp. 268-69.
45. See *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, comp. Richard L. Venezky and Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto 1980).
46. Also in Grendon, "Charms", E6, pp. 210-11, 235.
47. Also in Grendon, "Charms", A2, pp. 166-67, 215-16; Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, no. 3, pp. 121-22; Storms, *Magic*, no. 7, pp. 166-73; Sandmann, *Zauber-*

sprüchen, pp. 52-61. A somewhat similar remedy is found in MS. Bodley Auct. F-3-6 (2666), ed. Storms, *Magic*, no. 78, pp. 305-06 (N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* [Oxford 1957], no. 296, pp. 354-55).

48. Grendon, "Charms", E11, pp. 212-13, 236. The heading ("ad verrucas tollendas" [for removing warts]) in the only Latin MS to have this remedy is clearly erroneous.
49. Sandmann, *Zaubersprüchen*, pp. 52-61. See the description s.v. *typhus* in the *Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health*, ed. Benjamin F. Miller and Claire B. Keane, 4th edn (Philadelphia 1987), pp. 1276-78.
50. The most probable identification of this illness is chronic cirrhosis of the liver, accompanied by jaundice. Neurological symptoms "begin with subtle changes in mental acuity ... and may eventually progress to delirium, suicidal tendencies and coma" (Miller and Keane, *Encyclopedia* s.v. *cirrhosis*, pp. 263-64). It is therefore not atypical of diseases attributed to evil spirits.

Accompanying indigestion may be the reason for the name "elf-hiccup"; however, persistent hiccupping is one of the symptoms of uremia or "end-stage renal disease", along with "alterations in the level of consciousness, and convulsive seizures", and the skin is "a sallow grayish yellow color" (Miller and Keane, *Encyclopedia* s.v. *uremia*). Sometimes kidney and liver disease are associated; and perhaps the Anglo-Saxon leeches were unable to distinguish between them. I am grateful to Dr Jim Walker, M.B., B.S., B.A., who is researching medical practice in ancient Egypt (at Macquarie University), for discussing the problems of identification with me. However, he is not responsible for the suggestions made.

51. *Leechbook III.62* is also edited as a charm by Grendon, "Charms", B5, pp. 194-95, 229; Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, no. 7, pp. 124-25; Storms, *Magic*, no. 5, pp. 158-63; and has been discussed in detail by Karl Schneider, "Zu den ae. Zaubersprüchen *Wip Wennum* und *Wip Wæterælfadl*", *Anglia* 87 (1969) 282-302 at 294-302, and by Sandmann, *Zaubersprüchen*, pp. 42-50. It is not clear from the OE description that the mind of the victim of *wæterælfadl* was disturbed.

Dr Jim Walker suggests that the darkness of the fingernails was caused by lack of oxygen (hypoxaemia) due to chronic chest disease (e.g. tuberculosis; see description in Miller and Keane, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 1270-72). Tuberculosis can affect the skin and the lymph glands in the neck, which may account for the sores and earache mentioned in the incantation.

Storms, however, suggests that the disease is chicken pox, "called 'water-pokken' in Dutch and 'Wasserpocken' in German The way in which chicken-pox appear and disappear may well have given rise to the belief that a mischievous elf was playing his tricks. Its symptoms are a burning feeling on the affected spots, and when the sores burst a liquid runs out and infects other parts of the body. Pox or pocks is related to words denoting goblins, imps, demons: OE *pucel*, Icel. *puki*, Shakespearean *Puck*, and the liquid suggests a 'water' elf".

Cameron (personal communication) agrees with Storms, on the grounds that *ælfadl* was at first believed to be caused by arrows shot by elves, and the word was then extended in use for any rash or pustular outbreak on the skin. *Wæterælfadl* would therefore be characterized by watery pustules.

Sandmann compares a Swedish folkname *Aliblast* = *aevblast* = 'illness blown by the elves' for a disease that appears and disappears suddenly, whose symptoms are a fever, a rash, swelling, and little itching red spots on the body.

Wæterælfadl can therefore not be equated with a specific disease, but was evidently used for a spontaneously occurring illness that could be described as "watery". Shingles (*Herpes zoster*), which usually affects adults and is caused by the chicken pox virus, in which very painful vesicles spread along the path of a nerve and can seriously affect eyes and ears, may also be included (Miller and Keane, *Encyclopedia* s.v. *Herpes zoster*, pp. 574-75).

Since there are no overtly Christian elements in the cure (apart from the holy water added to the herbal concoction), it is somewhat atypical as an "elf remedy".

52. Also in Grendon, "Charms", E8, pp. 210-11, 236; and in Storms, *Magic*, no. 20, pp. 244-47. Another salve against *nihtgengan* is in *Leechbook III.54*.
53. *Maxims I*, l. 66; ed. George P. Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie in *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (New York and London 1936), p. 159.

Some East Africans have a belief in the "nightwitch", always male, who alone moves about at night and who is contrasted with the possessor of an evil eye, who goes by day; see Jean Buxton, "Mandari Witchcraft" and John Middleton, "Witchcraft and Sorcery in Lugbara", in *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa*, ed. J. Middleton and E.H. Winter (London 1963), pp. 99-121 (at 99-101) and 257-75 (at 262-63) respectively.

54. Ed. Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, lx-lvii, clxiv-clxv, 55-57, 174-76, and perhaps more accessibly in *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, rev. D. Whitelock (Oxford 1967), pp. 174-76, nn. p. 280. See my discussion in "The *ides* of the Cotton Gnomic Poem", *Medium Ævum* 48 (1979) 23-39.
55. Bonser, *Medical Background*, p. 269, conjectures that "monstrosities" were believed to be procreated by demons, and that this was the origin of stories about *incubi*.
56. The Latin reads: "Ad occurso malos, ut non timeas Quamdui tecum portaveris nihil mali tibi occurrit" (For evil meetings, that you should not be afraid As long as you carry it with you, nothing evil will accost you). Another *Herbarium* remedy (§182.1) that may be relevant concerns eryngo (*gorgonion*; *Eryngium* sp.): "Se þe pas wyrtē mid him hafað, æghwylce yfele fotswaðu him ongean cumende he forbugeþ ge forðon se yfela man hyne forcurreþ oððe him onbugeþ" (He who has this plant with him, turns aside every evil track coming against him; indeed, the evil man turns back or gives way to him).
57. Also in Grendon, "Charms", D4, pp. 200-01, 232.
58. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.27.91; ed. and trans. H. Rackham et al., 10 vols (London 1938-62), VIII, 336-37. For chelidonium stones as amulets see my

Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 96 (Oxford 1981), pp. 7, 107-08.

59. Grattan and Singer, *Magic and Medicine*, pp. 37-38.
60. See Peter Bierbäumer, *Der botanische Wortschatz des Altenglischen, I. Teil: Das Læcebo*, Grazer Beiträge zur englischen Philologie 1 (Frankfurt 1975), p. 129. For *atorlape* (unidentifiable), see Bierbäumer, *ibid.*, pp. 7-8 and also his 2. *Teil: Lacnunga, Herbarium Apuleii, Peri didaxeon* (1976), pp. 3-4, and 3. *Teil: Der botanische Wortschatz in altenglischen Glossen* (1979), p. 6. M.L. Cameron suggests (personal communication) that *atorlape* is fumitory (*Fumaria* or *Corydalis* sp.), equated (through a misunderstanding) by the Anglo-Saxon translator of the *Herbarium* with *gallicrus*, i.e. *Panicum crus galli* L., cockspur grass.
61. Also in Grendon, "Charms", E10, pp. 212-13, 236.
62. See Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, I, xli-xliv.
63. A similar remedy concerns wild chervil (§86.4): "Gyf hwylc yfeldæde man purh ænige æfpancan operne begaleþ ..." (If any evil-doing man because of illwill enchant another ...), rendering "Si quis malevolus devotaverit hominem" (If any sorcerer enchant a man).
64. The amulets consisting of relics of saints or words of scripture that, Alcuin complains, were worn by men around their necks during sexual intercourse may well have been to prevent impotence (whether magically induced or not); E. Dümmler, ed., *Alcvini epistolae*, Monumenta Germaniae historica, *Epistolae IV, Epistolae Karolini aevi II* (Berlin 1895), no. 291, p. 449.
65. Theodore's, Liv.7; Egbert's VII.7. Probably the most accessible edition is by A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 3 vols (Oxford 1871), III, 173-213 (at 180) and 413-31 (at 424) respectively. These provisions are discussed in my paper "Anglo-Saxon Idolators and Ecclesiasts from Theodore to Alcuin", forthcoming in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 5 (1990).
66. Josef Raith, ed., *Die altenglische Version des Halitgar'schen Bussbuches (sog. Poenitentiale pseudo-Ecgberiti)*, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 13 (Hamburg 1933), IV.12-14, pp. 53-54; Roger Fowler, "A Late Old English Handbook for the Use of a Confessor", *Anglia* 83 (1965) 1-34 at 25.
67. Ll. 157-58, ed. Skeat, *Lives of Saints*, I, 374-75.
68. Cockayne interprets it as "a rune lay". See my discussion in "Women, Witchcraft, and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England", in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D.G. Scragg (Manchester 1989), pp. 9-40 at 14-15.
69. See Frederick T. Elworthy, *The Evil Eye* (London 1895); D. McKenzie, *The Infancy of Medicine* (London 1927), pp. 255-62. For the Middle East see E.A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*, 1st edn (London 1930, repr. New York 1978), ch. 20, pp. 354-65; Brian Spooner, "The Evil Eye in the Middle East", in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (London 1970), pp. 311-19.
70. W.H. Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford 1904; new impression with article by Dorothy Whitelock, 1959), p. 55. Translation from Simon

Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great* (Harmondsworth 1983), p. 89.

71. See C.T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1879), s.v. *effascinatio*, *effascino*, *fascinatio*, *fascino*, *fascinum*. These passages from Pliny's *Natural History* (ed. Rackham et al.) clarify the usage: 7.2.16-18, 13.9.40, 19.19.50, 26.62.96, 28.7.35, 28.7.39, 28.27.101, 37.54.145.
72. There is a very similar example from Heliodorus; see Elworthy, *Evil Eye*, p. 33. See also Amica Lykiardopoulos, "The Evil Eye: Towards an Exhaustive Study", *Folklore* 92 (1981) 221-30, esp. p. 226. Lykiardopoulos's article contains references to earlier works on the evil eye.
73. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred*, p. 254, n. 140.
74. I am grateful to Professor J. Nicholls, formerly of Sydney University, for this suggestion.
75. See Venezky and Healey, *Microfiche Concordance s.v. malscrung*.
76. Grendon, "Charms", B4, pp. 190-95, 226-29; Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, no. 2, pp. 119-21; Storms, *Magic*, no. 9, pp. 186-97 at 188. Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 304-05, 352-53, 386-87 translated *gegymed* (*Leechbook III.65*) as "overlooked" – i.e. affected by the evil eye. Bonser refutes this interpretation, *Medical Background*, pp. 105-07.
77. Richard Jente, *Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altenglischen Wortschatz*, Anglistische Forschungen 56 (Heidelberg 1921), para. 176, pp. 310-11.
78. This renders: "Fugat et daemonia et in domo posita prohibet mala medicamenta; evertit oculos malorum hominum" (It also puts to flight demons, and placed in the home prevents evil medicines; it turns aside the eyes of evil men).
79. T.C. Lethbridge, *A Cemetery at Shudy Camps, Cambridgeshire*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society Quarto Publications, n.s. 5 (Cambridge 1936), p. 31.
80. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets*, p. 209.
81. E.g. G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, vols III-IV: *Saxon Art and Industry in the Pagan Period* (London 1915), III, pls xli, xlivi; Nils Åberg, *The Anglo-Saxons in England* (Uppsala 1926), pp. 28-39.
82. James Herriot, *All Creatures Great and Small* (London 1976), p. 193.
83. See my discussion in "Ælfric and Idolatry", *Journal of Religious History* 13 (1985) 119-35.
84. Michele Stephen, "Master of Souls: The Mekeo Sorcerer", in *Sorcerer and Witch in Melanesia* (Melbourne 1987), pp. 41-80 (though admittedly here the most exacting technique was employed to make money by making someone sick "and then demand[ing] hefty fees to cure them", p. 46).
85. For a paper dealing with the theories underlying treatment, see Jerry Stannard, "The Theoretical Bases of Medieval Herbalism", *Medical Heritage* 1 (1985) 186-98.